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**From:** Mathilda Ravine [mailto:mathilda.ravine@dhs.gov]  
**Sent:** Monday, August 09, 2004 5:40 PM  
**To:** ADMIN-S&E  
**Subject:** Uphold NEPA Protections and Public Review Provisions

Department of Homeland Security  
Environmental Planning, Office of Safety and Environment  
Via Email to [admin-S&E@hq.dhs.gov](mailto:admin-S&E@hq.dhs.gov)

Dear Secretary Ridge and Homeland Security staff,

I oppose your department's proposal for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act. The current proposal allows too many exclusions from NEPA and could close off government activities previously subject to public review.

One of NEPA's purposes is to allow the public to review federal actions that could adversely affect the environment. The department's proposal impedes public review with overly broad categorical exclusions. As a past environmental contractor at an Air Force installation subject to NEPA's provisions, I know how useful categorical exclusions are for routine activities that pose no risk of environmental harm. However, some of the proposed exclusions include activities that could cause significant environmental damage. For example, construction of fences and barriers by the Border Patrol could impede wildlife migration and degrade wilderness values, while ground patrols in border areas could destroy or damage critical habitat for endangered species. Some proposed categorical exclusions, such as logging and disposal of waste and hazardous material, should be completely abandoned to ensure continued protection of human health and the environment, while many other exclusions should be narrowed in scope.

While I support your department's mission, the breadth of the undefined categories of information to be withheld from public view is a tremendous and unwarranted expansion of the current policy. Information, such as analysis of a gas pipeline's potential for leaks and explosions, is critical to the public's ability to protect itself and should not be withheld. Unless strictly warranted, government operations must be conducted under the scrutiny of the public that funds them. The proposal should be more specific so as to minimize withheld information and maximize transparency.

The proposal goes well beyond what is necessary to protect national security and endangers the democratic ideals the Department of Homeland Security was created to protect. I strongly urge you to limit the use of categorical exclusions and the withholding of information as narrowly as possible.

Sincerely,  
Mathilda Ravine

8/10/2004